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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to explore the idea of how various interests representing public education can be brought into a collaborative alliance. Within this paper, a rationale for a collaborative alliance is analyzed by exploring the degree to which the implications of federal and state regulations and mandates have restricted the creativity and flexibility of public education. The paper explores, first, the implications for educaton by reviewing national and state trends and the education profession's role; second, who is qualified to speak for education and what are the common issues in public education; third, a rationale for cooperation and an alliance; fourth, the role of higher education; and fifth, the role of the Southern Regional Council on Educational Administration. Ten references are included. (SI)

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AN ORGANIZATIONAL MOSAIC FOR THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

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AN ORGANIZATIONAL MOSAIC FOR THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

Introduction

Overview

The purpose of this paper is to explore the idea of how various interests representing public education can be brought together into some type of collaborative alliance. Within this paper, a rationale for a collaborative alliance is analyzed by exploring the degree to which the implications of federal and state regulations and mandates have restricted the creativity and flexibility of public education. The following questions are posed: 1) How can the trend toward politicization of public education be changed? 2) How can the education profession influence public opinion and, thereby, bring research data back into the political process as the primary basis for political decisions? 3) Can public opinion be used to influence educational decisions that currently are being made without the involvement of the leadership of professional organizations?

The problem is to stem the tide toward mandates and restrictive regulations and, at the same time, organize the education profession to speak up for what is sound educational practice. Who really is qualified to speak up for education? Since no one group is able to speak for education effectively by itself, can common educational interests be identified that all education groups would be willing to endorse?

Common educational interests can be identified and achieved only by cooperation and collaboration of educational groups through some type of alliance. The paper will explore first, the implications for education by reviewing national and state trends and the education profession's role; second, who is qualified to speak for education and what are the common issues in public education; third, a rationale for cooperation and an alliance; fourth, the role for higher education; and

fifth, the role of the Southern Regional Council on Educational Administration (SRCEA).

Implications for Education

On the national level, the trends and directions would appear to be focused on several directions. First, decreased funding has occurred. Shotgun funding for specific categories without a rationale has taken place rather than general aid to be used by district personnel where needs are most apparent. A variety of federal regulations, designed to improve the quality of education and trying to obtain better value for the dollar, have become restrictive. Restrictive measures provide the means to more political power. The altruisitic motives and noble intent to improve the quality of education may be a disguise for the creation of self serving, power- grabbing, manipulative agency regulations.

Reforms resulting from *A Nation at Risk*, Coleman Report and Carnegie Report on *High Schools* were proposed by groups outside of the education profession. In many instances, the groups were not aware of educational problems in rural areas, inner cities, nor the research on effective schools. Thus, public education reforms have been determined by popular myths rather than being based on research. Decisions for the directions of education are being mandated by political and public groups. Are mandates the best way to accomplish educational improvements? The education profession needs to address the tendency of political and public demands to generate mandates, regulations and restrictions.

State Reforms

Most of the substantive education reforms are occurring at local and state levels. State boards of education have become "super" boards. From the various legislative acts, the boards have been assigned the function of carrying out legislative mandates, upgrading public schools and regulating schools and school boards. State legislatures have been quick to restrict the autonomy of public schools and prerogatives of school boards by establishing regulations for implementing such things as school improvement councils, certification requirements, merit pay, etc. The erosion of local participation in the various states has occurred through state legislatures ignoring their responsibility to protect local participation. Thus, state regulations of defining minimums, administrative assessment by state agencies, teacher and administrative incentives,

basic skills, exit examinations for graduation and gifted programs are examples of mandates placed on local participation. Many of these mandated programs are based on erroneous information rather than research-based approaches that will improve learning.

One myth is the value placed on merit pay. Since public sentiment favors merit pay, many states have implemented merit pay plans. There is little research evidence to indicate that merit pay plans will act as an incentive to improve classroom teaching. No one argues with the idea of additional pay for outstanding work. The difficulty comes in reaching a consensus over the criteria used and the weighting of that criteria for final determination of meritorious work. Thus, merit pay is only as effective as the integrity of the interpretation of the person employing the criteria to determine merit pay. However, there is no evidence that merit pay will improve the learning of the student.

Another myth is the belief that basic skills will be improved by the enactment of exit examinations which require demonstrated proficiency before the high school diploma is awarded. If careful guidelines are not established, teachers may feel the pressure to teach to the test to maintain their jobs or, more importantly, to receive merit pay. The private sector will be encouraged to set up coaching schools to assist students to master the required basic skills. Those families with financial resources will make sure that their children pass the examination. Conversely, those families without financial resources probably will be discriminated against. The bottom line is: will this testing result in improved learning for students? This type of testing program may sort and categorize learners and determine teacher effectiveness instead of diagnosing and prescribing what learners need to know about basic skills.

Finally, the political tendency by state governors and legislatures to propose and regulate reforms for higher education has increased during this decade. During the summer of 1985 in Philadelphia, proposals were discussed by governors at an Education Commission of the States meeting to reform tenure and curriculum of higher education institutions. Control is being debated as to whether it should be exercised by university faculty and administration or by decisions of state governors and legislators. In the proposals, the role of the faculty and university administration is unclear or not being considered.

Role of Federal and State Legislatures and Agencies

Congress, state legislatures, federal and state agencies should be stimulatory not restrictive. The climate ought to exist where specific legislation and restrictive regulations should be the exception rather than the rule. The political process should stimulate creativity and not encourage restrictive regulations.

Approximately every twenty years, external conditions build to a point where public pressure triggers political reactions leading to the implementation of restrictive mandates and regulations that alter the course of public education. For example, by 1960, the launching of Sputnik brought about public pressure for additional emphasis on mathematics and science, basic education, gifted education, federal grants and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. By comparison, today's educational reforms also are stressing science and mathematics, basic skills, gifted programs, science of teaching and federal and state evaluations of teaching as means of improving learning in the public schools. The result of these cycles is that states have instituted various reforms as mandates that do not necessarily improve education and are not based on stimulating creative approaches to resolving problems. Thus, the outcome is more mandates and regulations which contribute to standardization and compliance by all concerned with public education. In practice, the regulations have become restrictive instead of being flexible and creative. There is little research evidence that mandates or regulations do improve education. This raises a major question for consideration: who in the education profession should assume the responsibility for encouraging reforms based on educational research rather than political fiat?

The Role of the Education Profession

At issue is what can be done by the education profession to influence the passage of federal and state legislation based on sound educational research data? It should be obvious that the education profession cannot eliminate the political process but might be able to channel or influence the process toward stimulating policies and away from restrictive regulations. Although the legislation is general in application and the intent is noble, the outcome is restrictive. Are mandates the best way to get the job accomplished? The regulations are resulting in the politicization of power at the federal and state levels at the expense of flexiblity and creativity on the local level.

From a historical perspective in the original enactment of the U.S. Department of Education (USOE) in 1867, three major responsibilities were stated:

a. conduct research (facts) to show the condition and progress of education;
b. disseminate results (facts) of research;
c. promote the cause (support) of education throughout the country.

How far has the U.S. Department of Education (USOE) strayed from its original charge? It is obvious there has been a set of federal regulations that has continued to expand from Congress, court and executive decisions. The growth in federal grants from the Morrill Act up to the present for support of colleges and universities is just one example. Many more examples could be cited.

The focus of legislation and regulation should encourage and stimulate development of policies and procedures rather than restrictions. How have mandated programs or regulations improved instruction?

Who is responsible for restoring the public's confidence in the education profession? How does the education profession regain the public's confidence in its' leadership? Given the present climate at federal and state levels, political action by the profession may be necessary to build public confidence. The public needs accurate information about education, not political opinion. The education profession must communicate clearly concerns and needs to the public. The profession must use public support to influence the political process. Public confidence in education can be restored by sharing professional needs and concerns with the public. Would the profession supporting a particular need have a direct impact on the political process? Public opinion can be molded to support education's decisions based on research by the profession.

It is important to note that some mandates have infringed upon the legal prerogatives of local schools and school boards and, thereby, reduced local participation. The trend, thus, is away from local participation. If the trend continues away from local participation, will this mean an eventual loss of individual freedom? Where are the forces of control located? With better than fifty percent of annual state appropriations in many state budgets going toward education, legislators will be involved in education. The biggest single enterprise of state government is the provision for public education. State governors are "itching" to have a say over how the money is spent and they are making headway in their efforts. Typically, public schools see little of the money reach the district. Most of the money

appropriated for reforms and changes ends up as administrative costs rather than being placed directly in classrooms. Millions of dollars end up being needed for personnel to implement and administer complex programs and regulations. What is the cost to administer current federal and state programs? The mandates and regulations are well meaning but too often result in standardization and compliance by all concerned with public education. The formal procedures have become largely restrictive although the intent was to improve learning. Regulations have reduced flexibility and stifled creativity. Research has been replaced by demands of special interest groups at the expense of educating all youth. Special interest groups that are vocal and organized are able to secure legislation when more pressing needs may be overlooked because the profession is not organized. How can the education profession regain public confidence in its' leadership rather than have the public look to political and special interest groups to answer educational needs of society?

On the university level, legislators have been quick to take the university's prerogatives and give them to various state agencies. Tenure and curricula have become part of the state legislature's and governor's concerns. The university faculties and administrations must play a major role in decisions regarding higher education. Higher education must have the autonomy to regulate itself. What is the supporting role of higher education for public elementary and secondary education? The university is essential in providing assistance to public schools to upgrade curriculum, training of administrators and teachers, providing educational services and conducting basic and applied research.

Statement of the Problem

Rationale for Alliance

Since no one group is powerful enough by itself to influence public opinion on federal and state levels, the perplexing problem is who really speaks for education? The profession has many specific groups for various professional interests. Each group has a specific professional interest such as supervision, curriculum, teachers and counselors. All education groups want to influence educational policy decisions at federal, state and local levels. Individually, each education group advocates certain things for public schools. All education groups have common interests regarding public education.

All desire to improve learning, instruction and provide maximum educational opportunity for all youth.

Can these common educational interests be served best and achieved by collaboration and cooperation through some type of alliance-partnership as a future policy for public education? There is a need for a professional partnership to influence the future direction of education. What direction should the decision-making process take and who should be responsible? There needs to be a refocusing of responsibility on federal, state and local levels.

Areas of Common Agreement

Some areas of common agreement for formulation of an alliance among professional groups might be the concern over basic skills, science of instruction, teacher and administrator supervision and evaluation, and research for classroom use. Each of these items could be developed further but the intent of listing these is to provide a basis for exploration of these areas of commonality that could be the focal point for an alliance among educational organizations.

The important question is: can educational organizations bury the hatchet on specialized interests, play down the differences among themselves and concentrate on a concerted effort to have a common, united front on one or more of the previously mentioned areas? Can we say that what is good for education also is good for the profession? Working together through an alliance of the various educational organizations is the key to a common, united front.

Can we achieve cooperation among educational organizations in order to form an alliance? Should the profession act while there is still time to influence changes before they occur? The alliance should involve everyone interested in public education because everyone has a stake in education.

In summary, no one educational group or organization by itself has been persuasive enough to influence professional decisions on any governmental level. There is a need for a collaborative effort (alliance) to communicate educational concerns to the public and political groups. Either we unite or we continue to lose control over our profession.

The Role of Higher Education

One of the burning issues at this point in time has to do with the question: what is the role for higher education in the future of public elementary and secondary education? For example, the universities

can assist public education to: 1) provide initial and continued training of teachers and administrators, 2) conduct basic and applied research, 3) supply field and consulting services, 4) assist in developing procedures for recruitment, screening and placement of professional personnel, and 5) help in coordinating placement services. Two other roles of assisting public schools and districts in carrying out legislative mandates and helping to upgrade schools should be placed in the context of previously mentioned guidelines. Legislators are quick to take away university prerogatives and give them to other state agencies. In many instances, the universities no longer have autonomy nor do we enjoy the academic freedom we once possessed.

Given the professional groups in higher education, what do these organizations see as their role and direction? Can we assume that the functions of training teachers and administrators will continue to remain in higher education? Should teacher training be placed in university, state department or school district settings? There already have been attempts made to establish teacher centers. Initial training and certification already have been monitored closely in many states. Several examples already exist of administrative training outside of the university. Currently, in South Carolina, administrators cannot be certified unless they have gone through an Administrative Assessment Center run by the State Department of Education. Consider another alternative: what if universities undertook principal training under contract with school districts such as has occurred already in Texas and Kansas? More importantly, can teachers and administrators be trained effectively without universities? If this traditional training function were no longer part of the ongoing mission of higher education, would we still have jobs and careers in the future?

A careful review of the relationship between state departments of education and universities needs to be undertaken. Each organization has a unique role and purpose whereby each agency can support the functions of the other. State departments need to be stimulatory rather than regulatory. The universities need to provide support services which assist state departments in upgrading public schools. All too often universities do not provide service because the reward system is directed more toward research. Yet service may be more important to gaining public support for higher education. At the present time, several state departments are conducting teacher and administrator assessment programs. This may be due in part to growing legislative mandates rather than state department policies. Can certification be accomplished without universities? Where does regulation and mandate end and the improvement of education begin?

Types of Alliances

It is essential to identify common interests of the education profession. A procedure for identifying common goals will need to be explored. Once common areas of agreement have been identified, it will be necessary to determine how an alliance of professional education groups can be formed. Careful attention needs to exercised in the formation of the alliance. Professional organizations need a chance to express their viewpoints as well as hear other viewpoints. It is important that consensus be reached on common areas of agreement in order to have a united front.

Next, what representative groups need to be considered for inclusion in the formation of an alliance? No professional group should be excluded that has an interest in education and is willing to discuss common areas of agreement. The difficulty comes in how the groups are going to meet in a forum to discuss the formation of an alliance. There are many groups representing education which complicate the formation of an alliance. Organizational strategies will need to be developed, proposed and implemented along with guidelines and agenda for the meetings.

The next concern is finding an organization or agency that is willing to act as the host to sponsor an initial meeting. Careful attention needs to be directed to finding some entity that is willing to provide a forum on which the issues may be investigated. It is essential to conduct the initial meeting without any preconceived notion as to what the agenda and common interests will be. Is it possible that the Truman Pierce Institute at Auburn University might be willing to serve as the host agency?

The Role of the Southern Regional Council on Educational Administration

In order to bring this paper to a conclusion and open discussion, it should be determined if the SRCEA wants to be involved in assisting the educational enterprise in the formation of an alliance? It would mean a commitment of human and financial resources over the next months and years. What is the SRCEA's position? What do individual members see as the organization's role in the formation of an alliance? Can higher education assume that the main function of training teachers and administrators will continue? At issue is whether the membership of the SRCEA believes an alliance is essential to the profession? Is this approach also seen as a way for higher education

to communicate its concerns to the public? Should the SRCEA take action while there is still time to influence change? Is a common, united front needed for education as a profession to reduce regulations and communicate higher education's needs to the public? As indicated previously, the rationale for an alliance is to challenge professional organizations to form a common, united front and communicate education's concerns to the public. The SRCEA could provide invaluable assistance in the establishment of an alliance. Either the education profession is united and stands together or divided it falls.

Conclusion

In conclusion, does the SRCEA wish to take responsibility for initiating and helping form an alliance? Should higher educational organizations act in unison with other educational organizations that have interests in public elementary and secondary education while there is an opportunity to influence changes before they occur? We all must de-emphasize our differences and concentrate on our mutal interests to develop an organizational mosaic for the unification of support for public education. It is hoped that this position paper has been thought provoking, will stimulate discussion and help to initiate some plan of action.

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